

The Equilibrium of Business.

[Under this title Mr. Mason Green has an article in the April number of Donahoe's Magazine, from which we here make a few extracts respecting existing conditions.—EDITOR.]

At an auction sale in Salem, Ore., the other day, horses brought only \$7.50, hogs \$1.50, cows \$3, plows 30 cents, and so on—and this to satisfy a mortgage debt contracted under market conditions which, if maintained, would have enabled the farmer to pay his obligation from the product of the soil.

In Seattle, Wash., the owners of a business block worth \$250,000 three years ago are now convinced that it will not bring under the hammer the amount of the \$50,000 mortgage. Ten thousand people have left Oregon alone since last spring on account of the hard times, and the labor unions are warning their brothers of the East not to be misled by the optimistic resolutions of boards of trade, as times are desperately dull, and there is no sign of improvement.

The distress which for years has afflicted the farming districts of Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and the prairie West is beginning to reach the cities of those states. A charitable organization in Omaha, Neb., having exhausted its funds in the distribution of thousands of pounds of provisions among the destitute, has issued an appeal to the well-to-do containing this passage:

"If you have been doing your own housework, or a little more of it than you have been accustomed to, in order to help the poor; if you have done more of your own sewing, washing, or minding the baby than formerly, in consequence of the hard times, in the name of our Lord Jesus don't do it! You can afford to be saving in the line of books, pictures, or new carpets for the spring house decorations, which are so much needed, but you cannot afford to be saving when it comes to the hiring of work done in the renovation of your homes. You need the help; they need the pay for it; and you can get a class of house-cleaners and day help such as you never had before, who know how to wash windows without soiling the paper and furniture, because they have done it for themselves, and who can work for you without humiliation, but who could not accept your charity without a sting of shame, which might take years to remove from their thoughts."

The distress among the unemployed is doubly acute in consequence of the artificially high market price of certain commodities. Bituminous coal, which is mined at a cost of less than \$1 per ton, sells for \$6 and \$7 in Omaha, and anthracite for \$13 and \$14. You can buy in Omaha provision stores two chickens for a quarter, and they can be cooked, as is often done by the farmers, over a fire made of 22 cent corn (which costs 28 cents to raise) or of \$14 coal (whose cost at the pit's mouth is about 80 cents).

The owner of a small mine in a Pennsylvania village has accumulated a competence by taking out coal and trucking it about town for \$1.75 and \$2 per ton. His cousin, living in a Massachusetts city, paid \$6.75 per ton last autumn for his winter's supply.

The wage worker in the mines is not a beneficiary of the coal monopoly. The average number of days that the 129,050 men employed in the anthracite mines of the United States worked in 1892 was 198. These men supported their families for seven days upon less than four days' wages. Ten and fifteen years ago the miners earned comparatively handsome wages.

The factory is sinking by sure approaches to the level of the mine. Of

2,132 typical families working in cotton mills in various states, the bureau of statistics has found that only 168 owned houses, and 768 closed the year with a deficit, while the average saving per individual was 24.7 cents per day. This income is quite down to the Chinese standard, and much below the income of American millionaires, of whom a group consisting of three one hundredths of 1 per cent. of the population own as much property as 91 per cent. of the population.

Not only the common laborer but skilled labor itself has been a sufferer from the almost Siberian despotism of our system. The labor-saving machine does not save labor. A Boston daily newspaper is putting in thirty type-setting machines which means the discharge of sixty compositors. A rival newspaper is preparing to do the same, and it is within bounds to say that no less than 200 printers in Boston will fall before this little gatling gun of the composing room.

Boston and the West are very near neighbors, however much they may look over the fence and call one another hard names. After the failure of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad, certain families living on the avenues of Boston changed to the side streets in consequence of their losses; others closed a portion of their mansions and discharged their servants. The placing of seventy-one roads into receivers' hands has injured the New England factories and swelled the ranks of the unemployed, 40,000 of whom have been a burden to Boston the past winter. Boston and the West, I repeat, are neighbors, and in the long run will prosper or suffer together. A hungry farmer in Dakota means in the end a tramp in New England. The funny man of the Boston press may ring the changes on the tramp, and hold up to ridicule the governor of Kansas for issuing his circular to the police advising them not to arrest tramps as vagrants, but students should not make light of any non-producing class.

Tramps are the decayed fruit of competition. A mechanic in Boston, long out of work, being denied further credit by his grocer, recently filched a sack of flour. The grocer called a policeman, and both followed to the tenement of the mechanic, where the mother and children were found eating the flour made into a paste with cold water, there being no coal in the house. The policeman refused to arrest the mechanic.

"These men ought to be clubbed," was the remark of a Boston woman concerning the first procession of the unemployed this winter. "And their hungry families too?" asked a bystander. "Well, you know there is always a certain amount of suffering. God will take care of that. Even salvation comes by grace and not by any right in ourselves."

These expressions, brutal and un-Christian, carry with them the ethics of business. A wheat broker of Chicago, whose name I have, issued a confidential circular to his customers January 24, in which was this significant passage: "We look on the situation as unchanged and believe, until we get into weather markets, prices won't change much. We are in hopes the growing crop will be damaged. If it is, all the grain interests will be benefited."

The grain interests spoken of were the speculative interests. The rise of grain is the gambling expression for opportunity to force consumers to pay more for food. The brutality of the broker's hope, quoted above, is even more revolting than that of the mayor of Anderson,

Indiana, who is reported in the papers to have instructed his chief of police to furnish night patrolmen with black-snake whips to lash tramps out of town.

About Christmas time were discovered along the railroad between Kansas City and Fort Scott, lines of camp fires where tramps had erected shelters from the storm. It will soon appear that there are not rawhides enough to go round, nor policemen enough to do the lashing. As for clubs for the unemployed, their manufacture would be an industry in itself.

There are more tenants evicted in New York city alone in a year than in the whole of Ireland. Speculators understand what these evictions mean. The poor pay more rent per square foot of flooring than the rich, and, other things being equal, real estate investments in the lower wards pay better than in the more select districts. It is easy, therefore, to understand the rumor in Wall street that a syndicate has been formed to buy property when the real estate panic strikes New York. It will, however, be a year or two before New York wakes up to the gravity of the industrial situation.

Proprietor Kramer, of Atlantic Garden, in New York, refused to prosecute Charles Plager, who recently threw a brick through a \$15 window pane. Justice Tainter, of the Tombs court, was about to discharge the prisoner, when he cried: "If you discharge me, I'll break another window. I have no work, no money, no home, no friends, and may as well be in prison. I cannot beg and I will not steal." The justice accordingly held Plager for trial.

The average wage in New Orleans is \$1.07 per day; in Richmond, Va., 60 cents; in Augusta, Ga., 73 cents; in Louisville, Ky., 90 cents. Cotton hands can be hired for 50 cents. The average income of farmers in Georgia is 42 cents per day; in Mississippi, 74 cents; in Alabama, 44 cents.

In Alabama the private debts amount to \$26 per capita; Florida, \$40; Tennessee, \$23. In Alabama 15.44 per cent. of the assessed valuation of the real estate is covered by mortgage.

Coal from Alabama mines can be laid down in Mississippi at \$2 per ton at a profit. The market price is from \$4 to \$5.

Cotton cannot be raised and sold in the south at a profit below 8 cents, and it has been as low as 5 cents within a twelvemonth.

I shall not cloud this page with the story of hard times in the south in detail. It is a subject for a volume. A workingman fainted away in the Kimball house, Atlanta, Ga., one day in March. He had been looking for work for weeks, and it was a clear case of starvation. This did not check the boasts of the daily press that Atlanta was economically in a stalwart condition. The same may be said concerning a destitute baker in San Antonio, Tex., who took his life the same week. A young woman last autumn applied at all the dressmaking establishments in a Delaware city, and received one offer from all—six months for nothing, and after that \$2 per week. The city is notorious for loose women.

Heretofore poverty has been considered the special ward of philanthropists. That time has gone by. Poverty is a menace to capital. The unemployed class has become a permanent feature of our civilization.

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